

*The Expulsion of Isis Worshipers and Astrologers
from Rome in the Late Republic
and Early Empire**

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Introduction

Recent debates on religious violence in the Roman empire have focused mainly on the change from a polytheistic to a monotheistic empire, ‘das Problem des Monotheismus’, as stated by the Egyptologist Jan Assmann.¹ In the tradition of the Enlightenment, polytheism and traditional religious practices are depicted as tolerant, because their inclusive character allowed individuals to adhere freely to as many and whichever cults they desired.² The associated belief-systems are generally considered to have been open and non-coercive. Even the very category of ‘belief’ has been called into question, since it was the adequate performance of the rites that mattered. New cults could always be adapted and reinterpreted in familiar terms.³ Since gods and spirits were conceived of mainly as local entities, the veneration of foreign gods and spirits in a foreign country would be nothing more than a polite act: when in Alexandria, do as the Alexandrians do. Finally, nothing prevented an individual with enough backers and financial means from founding his or her own shrine.

* I would like to thank Christopher Lougheed for correcting my English.

¹ See the critical reassessment of the discussion by R. Bloch, ‘Polytheismus und Monotheismus in der paganen Antike: Zu Jan Assmanns Monotheismus-Kritik’, in R. Bloch et al. (eds.), *Fremdbilder – Selbstbilder. Imaginationen des Judentums von der Antike bis in die Neuzeit* (Basel, 2010) 5–24; J. N. Bremmer, ‘Religious Violence and Its Roots: A View from Antiquity’, *Asiaval* 6 (2011) 71–79 (repr. in W. Mayer and C. de Wet [eds.], *Reconceiving Religious Conflict: New Views from the Formative Centuries of Christianity* [London, 2018] 30–42), and ‘Religious Violence between Greeks, Romans, Christians and Jews’, in A. C. Geljon and R. Roukema (eds.), *Violence in Ancient Christianity: Victims and Perpetrators* (Leiden, 2014) 8–30 at 12–18.

² See the General Introduction, p. 4, Kippenberg, pp. 17–18, and Bremmer, p. 49, all this volume.

³ As e.g. with the so-called *interpretatio Romana*; see C. Ando, ‘Interpretatio Romana’, in L. de Blois, P. Funke and J. Hahn (eds.), *The Impact of Imperial Rome on Religion, Rituals and Religious Life in the Empire* (Leiden, 2006) 51–65.

Nevertheless, it is also well known that this picture of ancient religious tolerance is highly problematic.⁴ There are many ancient instances of violence against religious communities and particular religious practices. Governments could react with legal violence, especially when individuals or groups were considered a threat to society.⁵ Focusing on the period from the first century BCE to the first century CE, this chapter will explore when, how and why the Roman government of the late Republic and early empire took violent measures against the Isis cult and astrologers. Both came to Rome from the Hellenised eastern part of the Mediterranean and were seen by many Romans as foreign to their religious horizon. While the Romans lacked the means – and probably also the will – to exert control over most of the cult practices in the periphery of their empire, its centre, the city of Rome, was always a special case.

The elite in this period continued to define its Roman identity mainly with reference to the orally transmitted and malleable *mos maiorum*. At the same time, new imperial realities created destabilising political repercussions for members of the elite.⁶ The regulation of new cults arriving in Rome seemed to create particular problems for the cohesion of the elite, its place in the network of social relations of power and the power structure of its political institutions.⁷ In a society that was renegotiating the balance of power and renewing its social structure in the critical years of the first century BCE, foreign cults were an embedded part of political life and could be exploited to reach collective and individual goals.⁸

⁴ See on this point the General Introduction, pp. 6–7, and, especially, Bendlin, this volume, pp. 136–38.

⁵ Bremmer, ‘Religious Violence and Its Roots’, 77–78 (repr. in Mayer and De Wet, *Reconceiving Religious Conflict*, 34), points out that religious violence in Antiquity is mostly state-sponsored and could range from legal measures of prohibition to organised persecution. For the current debate on the concept of *polis*-religion in the Roman context, see J. Scheid, *Les dieux, l’État et l’individu: réflexions sur la religion civique à Rome* (Paris, 2013) 41–49.

⁶ See A. Bendlin, ‘Looking beyond the Civic Compromise: Religious Pluralism in Late Republican Rome’, in E. Bispham and C. Smith (eds.), *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome: Evidence and Experience* (Edinburgh, 2000) 115–35, for the rich debate on the embeddedness of religion in the social and political changes of the late Republic, and Scheid, *Dieux, l’État et l’individu*, for a response to the arguments of Bendlin.

⁷ We follow here E. M. Orlin, *Temples, Religion, and Politics in the Roman Republic* (Leiden, 1997), who argues that the Senate always sought control over temple building. Cf. A. Ziolkowski, *The Temples of Mid-Republican Rome and the Historiographical and Topographical Context* (Rome, 1992), who argues that foreign cults were not formally excluded from the urban core so long as enough land was available.

⁸ Using a sociological and anthropological approach, E. M. Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome: Creating a Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2010), makes a strong argument for the political will and capacity of the Romans to integrate foreign cults. He suggests that the personal agenda of individual Roman politicians was the main determining factor in the introduction or repression of foreign cults in

It must be emphasised, however, that the introduction of foreign gods and cults in Rome was not a late Republican novelty, but rather an integral part of Rome's political culture, playing an important part in the empire's success story. There were the early Republican rites of *evocatio* described by Livy, whereby Roman commanders invited the divine protectors of enemy cities to decamp to Rome. These *evocationes* would presumably have materially altered the sacral topography of Rome with new temples and festivals,⁹ though the rarity of these cases weighs against the historicity of the practice and suggests a later reconstruction.¹⁰ The point of these stories, however, is that the new cults were introduced to Rome by elite consensus as a diplomatic tool to politically integrate vanquished enemies.¹¹ One can argue that the towns of central Italy shared a common cultural heritage and that therefore these 'non-Roman' cults had never been entirely foreign. Nevertheless, these acts set a pattern that allowed for the successful arrival of other cults coming from all over the Mediterranean. Eventually Rome's involvement with the power politics of the Hellenistic kingdoms would lead to the introduction of several Hellenistic cults for diplomatic purposes, while at the same time pushing the elite to regulate and take violent action against foreign cults, if its members perceived that these cults ran afoul of the unwritten rules and customs (*mos maiorum*) that defined a distinct Roman identity and its associated civic religion.¹²

For instance, in the aftermath of an epidemic, the invitation of Asclepius in 293 BCE brought a non-Italic god to Rome. His worship was confined to the Tiber Island for medical reasons, but also because the appearance of the god in the form of a snake was completely new to the Romans. Beside the elite's interest in the Hellenic way of life, this outreach over the Adriatic Sea was a sign that Rome itself had become part of the Greek cultural world and was accepted as a political ally in the aftermath of the

Rome, an approach earlier taken by J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979) 20 and M. Beard, J. North and S. Price, *Religions of Rome*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1998) 134–40.

⁹ Orlin, *Foreign Cults*, 36–46.

¹⁰ Cf. F. Glinister, 'Sacred Rubbish', in Bispham and Smith, *Religion in Archaic and Republican Rome*, 54–70 at 61–63.

¹¹ G. Gustafsson, *Evocatio Deorum: Historical and Mythical Interpretations of Ritualised Conquests in the Expansion of Ancient Rome* (Uppsala, 2000) 46–55 and 83–86 on mythical historiography.

¹² Religious violence against the so-called Oriental cults has been treated by e.g. E. S. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy* (Leiden, 1990) 34–78; L. Rutgers, 'Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsion from the City of Rome during the First Century CE', in K. Donfried and P. Richardson (eds.), *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Grand Rapids, 1998) 93–116; Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome* 1, 91–96, 230–31.

succession wars of Alexander's heirs.¹³ A more problematic case of the introduction of a foreign deity to Rome was that of Cybele, the Magna Mater, following the Roman alliance with the Attalid Kingdom in 205/204 BCE. As in the case of the introduction of Asclepius, the importation of the goddess in the form of a black stone and the foundation of her temple followed wholly Roman models. Apparently, only after the cult was firmly established did some members of the Roman elite discover non-Roman practices in the temple precinct, like the self-castration of the priests of Attis, the acolyte of Cybele. Tact was required, since the introduction of the deity and its cult was a project of Rome's elite and important diplomatic ties were at stake: the result was that Roman citizens were ordered to abstain from non-Roman behaviour and were henceforth excluded from becoming priests of Cybele.¹⁴

Last but not least, after the Sibylline Books had been burned in 83 BCE, the Senate chose not to re-establish their content from Italian sources probably available in Cumae, but to send ambassadors to Asia Minor. This was clearly a political move: both a demonstration of faith in its allies in the war against Mithridates and a means of disciplining the 'rebellious' region of Campania.¹⁵ Not for nothing did the Emperor Claudius state in his speech to the Senate in 48 CE that Rome became great because its elite was able to advance its interests by integrating the best foreign elements.¹⁶ These examples show clearly that religious change and the introduction of new cults and deities in Rome required the sanction of the elite, with its political projects, but that the cults could be adapted to satisfy the *mos maiorum*, for example by integrating festivals associated with these cults into the official priestly calendar.¹⁷

It is clear, however, that not all foreign cults and religious practices were welcome, especially when their arrival was not the object of elite consensus. It was widely believed that foreign cults could undermine society with their strange behaviours, and they were therefore regarded as secret societies.¹⁸ Government-sponsored violence broke out only a few years after

¹³ Orlin, *Foreign Cults*, 62–70. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 76–84 and *passim*. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 202–203.

¹⁶ *CIL* XIII 1668; Tacitus, *Annals* 11.23–24, discussed by W. Riess, 'Die Rede des Claudius über das Ius Honorum der gallischen Notablen: Forschungsstand und Perspektiven', *REA* 105 (2003) 211–49.

¹⁷ For this pragmatic approach, see A. Bendlin, 'Nicht der Eine, nicht die Vielen: Zur Pragmatik religiösen Verhaltens in einer polytheistischen Gesellschaft am Beispiel Roms', in R. G. Kratz and H. Spieckermann (eds.), *Götterbilder, Gottesbilder, Weltbilder: Polytheismus und Monotheismus in der Welt der Antike*, vol. 2 (Tübingen, 2006) 279–311.

¹⁸ On fears of conspiracy, see D. Baudy, 'Prohibitions of Religion in Antiquity: Setting the Course of Europe's Religious History', in C. Ando and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Religion and Law in Classical and*

the arrival of the Magna Mater in the Bacchanalia affair of 186 BCE. Livy, our main literary source, and the *senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus* paradigmatically present the fears – real or imagined – and attest to the violent measures which the state could deploy against foreign cults, and its justification for the resort to violence as a battle against conspiracy and sorcery.¹⁹ But allusions in Plautus' plays lead us to believe that the cult was more widely known than the consul Spurius Postumius Albinus would have admitted in his report to the Senate. This new cult mainly consisted of freedmen, women and the uneducated, in short those on the margins of Roman society. All the same, in Livy's account, it is the members of the elite who are the worshippers and trigger the individual investigation of the consul. The consul acts at his own discretion and it is he who depicts the cult in terms of a conspiracy. It is not a religious council but rather the Senate which takes measures, and the *senatus consultum* is enforced not only in the city itself and against the elite (as in the case of the cult of Attis and Cybele), but on the whole peninsula.²⁰

In this way, a minor religious affair, little more than an infraction of Roman private law by a few members of the elite, launched a major political offensive aimed at controlling the private religious behaviour of both the elite and the masses in the entire territory directly governed by Rome, thereby setting the boundaries of proper Roman religious behaviour. We do not know how successful the policy was over the long term, though since many Bacchanals were privately and locally sponsored, one can argue that destroying the infrastructure and killing the leaders would be a decisive blow. Nevertheless, the measures did not prevent either the common people or members of the elite from embracing, introducing and sponsoring new cults. Indeed, the new rules proposed in the *senatus consultum* provided a model for making these new cults acceptable to the Roman *mos maiorum*.²¹

Christian Rome (Stuttgart, 2006) 100–14 at 105–09; D. Frankfurter, 'Religion in the Mirror of the Other: A Preliminary Investigation', in F. Prescendi and Y. Volokhine (eds.), *Dans le laboratoire de l'historien des religions: mélanges offerts à Philippe Borgeaud* (Geneva, 2011) 74–90.

¹⁹ Livy 39.8–19; *CIL* 1² 581 = *ILS* 18 = *ILLRP* 511.

²⁰ H. Cancik-Lindemaier, 'Der Diskurs Religion im Senatsbeschluss über die Bacchanalia von 186 v. Chr. und bei Livius (B. 39)', in H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and P. Schäfer (eds.), *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, vol. 2 (Tübingen, 1996) 177–96.

²¹ Orlin, *Foreign Cults*, 162–69, along with S. A. Takács, 'Politics and Religion in the Bacchanalian Affair of 186 BC', *HSPb* 100 (2000) 301–10, for the particular political dimensions. For a thorough review of the relevant scholarship, see J.-M. Pailler, *Bacchanalia: la répression de 186 av. J.-C. à Rome et en Italie: vestiges, images, tradition* (Paris, 1988); B. Perri, *Il 'senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus' in Livio e nell'epigrafe di Tiriolo* (Soveria, 2005); M. Riedl, 'The Containment of Dionysos: Religion and Politics in the Bacchanalia Affair of 186 BCE', *International Political Anthropology* 5 (2012) 113–33.

In any case, the Bacchanalia affair served as a blueprint for future state-sponsored violence against non-Roman cults, sanctioning the principle that the state could interfere in private cult practices if a magistrate thought it politically relevant. These actions against other cults might even reflect purely momentary political calculations, although to suppose that the Roman elite made a sustained effort to control the masses by policing private religious behaviour is to give too much credit to its law-enforcing capacity.

These preliminary remarks underline the fact that outbursts of so-called 'religious violence' in polytheistic societies go hand in hand with political, social and cultural factors. In the case of Rome, it is important to stress that the introduction of new cults was not necessarily negatively viewed. Although new irritants might accompany the introduction of the 'other' for the greater political good, the act as such was seldom reversed so long as the introduction of the new cult was a common project of the ruling elite. Even developments which we might anachronistically call 'subcultural', such as the Bacchus cult, the cults of Isis and Sarapis, and astrology, were not always within the view of the guardians of *Romanitas*, so long as it was not in the interests of an individual political actor or group to take action. Religious repression, regulation and the sometimes violent reaction of the ruling elite reflect a desire for greater elite cohesion and control of the behaviour of its members. They need to be seen in the wider context of political culture and the process of defining Roman identity.

Religious change should be understood, then, as a complex process of negotiations among the elite members of Roman society. Since its political culture underwent major changes in which political violence became prominent, and since religion is recognised as embedded in society, we will show that 'religious violence' is typically a by-product of political violence.²² The expulsions of members of the Sarapis and Isis cults as well as astrologers are symptomatic of these ongoing 'negotiations' of interest groups.

The Cults of Isis and Sarapis

The cults of Isis, Sarapis and the other members of their 'family' developed as a complex interchange of Greek and Egyptian religious practices in

²² Roman religion is inextricably linked with political life, as shown by J. Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* (Bloomington, 2003) and J. Rüpke, *Roman Religion* (Oxford, 2007). R. Alston, *Rome's Revolution: Death of the Republic and Birth of the Empire* (Oxford, 2015), paints a dark picture of the daily political violence at the end of the Republic.

Ptolemaic Egypt and spread throughout the Mediterranean world in the middle of the third century BCE. The state-sponsored manifestation of the cults by the Ptolemaic dynasty and its further adaptation in the Greek and Roman world explain both their rapid propagation and their persecution.²³ The cults had probably reached Rome by the end of the second century BCE as a by-product of continuous Roman involvement in the power politics of the Eastern Mediterranean.²⁴ It is therefore plausible that it was not the *plebs* but members of the governing elite who first came into contact with these cults. The so-called *Iseum Metellinum* was probably founded at this time by private sponsorship of a leading family, although evidence for the date, circumstances and even the place is inconclusive.²⁵ In any case, a funerary inscription dated between 90 and 60 BCE and naming T. Sulpicius Caecilius, probably a freedman, as a priest of a Capitoline Isis suggests that the cult had, by then, established its presence in the very heart of the city.²⁶

The interest of both the political class – and hence of the Roman authors – and the wider Roman public grew as Egypt became the main flashpoint of Roman foreign politics,²⁷ and as members of the Ptolemaic dynasty repeatedly tried to secure their position on the throne with the

²³ Current scholarship distinguishes two phases of expansion: the first, from the third century BCE onwards, sponsored by the Ptolemaic kings and their allies, and the second, after the end of the first century CE, sponsored by the Roman emperors. See L. Bricault, *Atlas de la diffusion des cultes isiaques (IV^e s. av. J.-C.–IV^e s. ap. J.-C.)* (Paris, 2001), and ‘La diffusion isiaque: une esquisse’, in C. Bolp (ed.), *Fremdheit – Eigenheit: Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom. Austausch und Verständnis* (Stuttgart, 2004) 548–56.

²⁴ On the political history, see G. Hölbl, *Geschichte des Ptolemäerreiches: Politik, Ideologie und religiöse Kultur von Alexander dem Großen bis zur römischen Eroberung* (Darmstadt, 1994); A. Lampula, *Rome and the Ptolemies of Egypt: the Development of Their Political Relations, 273–80 BC* (Helsinki, 1998); W. Huss, *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit, 332–30 v. Chr.* (Munich, 2001).

²⁵ The sole text reference is *Historia Augusta*, Thirty Tyrants 25.4. The location given by M. de Vos, ‘Iseum Metellinum’, in E. M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, vol. 3 (Rome, 1996) 110–12, is entirely conjectural and is based on F. Coarelli, ‘I monumenti dei culti orientali in Roma’, in U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren (eds.), *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell’impero romano* (Leiden, 1982) 33–67. Cf. M. Malaise, ‘Octavien et les cultes isiaques à Rome en 28’, in L. Bricault and R. Veymiers (eds.), *Bibliotheca Isiaca*, vol. 2 (Bordeaux, 2011) 185–99 at 198, who is far more critical about the limited evidence.

²⁶ *CIL* vi 2247 (= *ILS* 4405 = *ILLRP* 159 = *SIRIS* 377 = *RICIS* 501/0109), with Orlin, *Foreign Cults*, 204, based for this date on F. Coarelli, ‘Iside Capitolina, Clodio e i mercanti di schiavi’, in N. Bonacasa and A. di Vita (eds.), *Alessandria e il mondo ellenistico-romano: studi in onore di Achille Achiani* (Rome, 1984) 461–75, whereas Degraasi, in his commentary to the inscription in the *ILLRP*, proposes 58 BCE. For an extensive review of the scholarship on this inscription, see Malaise, ‘Octavien et les cultes isiaques’, 189.

²⁷ Y. Lehmann, ‘Varron et les cultes gréco-orientaux: étude de sociologie religieuse’, in B. Amiri (ed.), *Religion sous contrôle: pratiques et expériences religieuses de la marge?* (Besançon, 2016) 19–28, concludes that Varro’s interest in Egyptian cosmogenic theologies indicates that the erudite elite was also familiar with Isis and Sarapis.

assistance of ambitious Roman politicians.²⁸ Rome's political authorities did not intervene directly and the 'Egyptian' question was still open in 63 with Pompey's reorganisation of the East. Only in 58/57 was Ptolemy XII restored to his throne, thanks to Roman military intervention.²⁹ It is in connection with these political manoeuvres that the Senate ordered a first expulsion of priests of Isis and Sarapis and the destruction of their altars on the Capitoline hill in 58 BCE.

Tertullian's apologetical and polemical treatise *To the Nations*, our only source, explicitly connects this ban to the affair *de Bacchanalibus*, citing Varro.³⁰ In Tertullian's view, both incidents serve as instances in which the Senate abolished gods and their places of worship without consulting the people of Rome and without any sincere religious policy.³¹ Such measures could result in serious rioting. Unlike in the affair *de Bacchanalibus*, there were open challenges to the Senate's order because the offending monuments were clearly visible in the religious heart of Rome, the Capitoline hill, rather than hidden like the Bacchanals. The response from the masses was a clear challenge to the Senate's authority in religious matters. They even pressed the entering consul of 58, A. Gabinius, to include Isis and Sarapis in his initial offerings, and thus to take a counter-stance against the Senate. Although Gabinius did not revoke the senatorial measures or the destruction of the altars on the Capitoline hill, he did not otherwise forbid the performance of rituals.³²

²⁸ The Ptolemaic dynasts repeatedly bequeathed their kingdom to the Romans in absence of a male heir and as life insurance against possible usurpations. Orlin, *Foreign Cults*, 205, considers the events of 87 BCE, when Ptolemy IX or his son Ptolemy X allegedly bequeathed his throne to the people of Rome, as the beginning of domestic tensions over the cults of Isis and Sarapis at Rome. The testament, although it would not have been unprecedented (cf. *SEG IX 7* from 155 BCE), was simply a rumour, as has been shown by Huss, *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit*, 659–60 (based on Cicero, *On the Agrarian Law* 1.1, 2.41–44).

²⁹ Huss, *Ägypten in hellenistischer Zeit*, 682–95, for a detailed account and the evidence.

³⁰ Tertullian, *Ad nationes* 1.10.16–18 (*CCSL* 1, p. 25) and *Apologeticum* 6.8 (*CCSL* 1, pp. 97–98). Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* 2.73 (pp. 152–53 Marchesi) follows Tertullian and shares his view of the persecution of 58 BCE as a landmark event.

³¹ Lehmann, 'Varron et les cultes gréco-orientaux', 20–21, suggests that Varro was a member of the *Xviri sacris faciundis* in 58, and thus the instigator of the edict that Tertullian cites in an abridged version. A. Rolle, 'Ego medicina Serapi uttor: les Ménippées de Varron et le culte de Sérapis dans la Rome tardo-républicaine', in Amiri, *Religion sous contrôle*, 29–40, demonstrates Varro's familiarity with several aspects of the Isis cult and his satirical use of it. She discusses all the evidence in A. Rolle, *Varrone e i culti orientali a Roma* (Pisa, 2016) 122–221.

³² It is still debated whether Gabinius was a worshipper of Isis owing to his allegiance to Sulla and Pompey, two alleged supporters of Isis in Rome, as suggested by L. Hayne, 'Isis and Republican Politics', *AClass* 35 (1992) 143–49, who explains the various senatorial actions against Isis throughout the 50s and 40s as directed against Pompey. S. A. Takács, *Isis and Sarapis in the Roman World* (Leiden, 1995) 62–63, explains Gabinius' decision not to confront the Senate as part of his allegiance to the *optimates*. See also M. Ciceroni, 'Introduzione ed evoluzione dei culti egiziani a Roma in età

Thus the proliferation of new shrines and sanctuaries continued elsewhere in the city.³³

In 53 BCE the target was not public altars and the public visibility of the Isis cult but privately erected shrines. Now the senatorial decree sought to ban the cult not only from the religious centre – what could be tentatively called the locus of civic religion – but also from the nominal perimeter of the city, the *pomerium*, thus enhancing the religious connotation of the ban and the ‘non-Romaness’ of the cult. This measure shows an increasing sensitivity towards the cult.³⁴ Cassius Dio, our only source for this event, who lived under Severan emperors who had fully embraced the cults of Isis and Sarapis in their imperial self-representation, interprets this measure as another bad omen for the following year in a list of traditional Roman *prodigia* announcing further fighting in the civil strife.³⁵ Again the measures fell short of eradicating the cult practices because they did not target followers and priests outside the *pomerium*, which had in any case ceased to be the physical boundary of the city. The *pomerium* now arguably served instead as an ideological boundary between the centre of civic religion and the place of the other deities of the empire.

The next incident, in 48 BCE, often interpreted as a retaliation for the murder of Pompey in Egypt, is also reported by Cassius Dio, again in a summary of dire religious events. The story reads like a conflict between civic and new cults, in that precincts (τεμενίσματα) of Isis and Sarapis on the Capitoline hill were destroyed because the soothsayers (*haruspices*) blamed them for a bad *prodigium*, a swarm of bees found on a nearby statue of Hercules. While destroying the precincts, remains of human flesh were found, giving the whole episode a sinister tone that correlates with the fear of conspiracy, as in the Bacchanalia affair.³⁶ As in 58 BCE, the measures look like the purification of sacred public space on the Capitoline

republicana: la testimonianza delle fonti letterarie’, in G. Caratelli (ed.), *Roma e l’Egitto nell’antichità classica* (Rome, 1992) 103–107 at 106; A. Arena, ‘Romanità e culto di Serapide’, *Latomus* 60 (2001) 297–313 at 302–303; Malaise ‘Octavien et les cultes isiaques’, 191–92.

³³ M. J. Versluys, ‘Isis Capitolina and the Egyptian Cults in Late Republican Rome’, in L. Bricault (ed.), *Isis en Occident: actes du II^{ème} colloque international sur les études isiaques* (Leiden, 2004) 421–48, makes it clear that there is no evidence for a temple of Isis on the Capitoline hill.

³⁴ See also Varro’s reaction as reported in Servius’ *Commentary on the Aeneid of Virgil* 8.698: *Varro indignatur Alexandrinos deos Romae coli* (‘Varro was indignant that Alexandrian gods were worshipped in Rome’).

³⁵ Cassius Dio 40.47.3–4, on which see P. Cordier, ‘Dion Cassius et les phénomènes religieux “égyptiens”: quelques suggestions pour un mode d’emploi’, in L. Bricault, M. J. Versluys and P. G. P. Meyboom (eds.), *Nile into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman World* (Leiden, 2007) 89–110 at 98–100, who interprets the τέρας as *omen imperii*; cf. Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 64.

³⁶ Cassius Dio 42.26.

hill with the goal of eliminating unwanted divine competition.³⁷ The episode is of particular interest since Cassius Dio specifies that the Romans used a de-sacralisation rite when razing the shrines.³⁸ But even this was met with the flat refusal of the workforce to destroy the sacred precincts. Some of those involved (slaves, freedmen, members of the *plebs*) may conceivably have been worshippers of Isis and Sarapis themselves. According to Valerius Maximus, the consul L. Aemilius Paullus was compelled to personally wield the ritual axe, *securis*, to start the destruction of the shrine.³⁹ The divide between, on the one hand, the Senate and executive magistrates, who together formed the ruling elite, and, on the other hand, the masses clearly comes to the fore in this episode, just as it did in the incidents of 58 BCE.

Given the political background of the ‘Egyptian question’ and the fact that our documentary and literary sources identify mainly freedmen and members of the *plebs* as adherents to the Isis cult, two models for interpreting the events have been suggested. Older research, especially that which follows the ‘decadence model’ of Roman religion, views these regulations as futile attempts to free Rome from corrupting foreign elements.⁴⁰ The Senate and the consuls A. Gabinius and L. Aemilius Paullus, in this view, were reasserting the authority of the Senate to direct the

³⁷ Rodney Stark’s sociological concept of the ‘religious marketplace’ has generally been favourably received in discussions about religions in the Roman empire; see W. Mayer, ‘Re-Theorising Religious Conflict’, in Mayer and De Wet, *Reconceiving Religious Conflict*, 3–29 at 7–9, and her chapter, this volume, p. 259. In our case, it is important to remember that the *haruspices* themselves had been imported into the ‘Roman marketplace’ and thus found their niche of expertise there, as shown by D. Briquel, ‘*Etrusca disciplina* and Roman Religion: From Initial Hesitation to a Privileged Place’, in D. Engels and P. Van Nuffelen (eds.), *Religion and Competition in Antiquity* (Brussels, 2014) 112–32. The model of ‘competition’ is argued for at length by S. Montero, ‘*Haruspices contra Isiaci*: la oposición adivinatoria a la introducción del culto isiaci en Roma’, in J. A. Delgado-Delgado (ed.), *Dioses viejos dioses nuevos: formas de incorporación de nuevos cultos en la ciudad antigua* (Las Palmas, 2006) 41–52.

³⁸ Cassius Dio 42.26.2, which points to the rite of *exauguratio*. We are best informed about this rite in the case of new temple building projects, the classic case being that of the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol, where the gods of the existing shrines needed to be asked to accept the change; see Glinister, ‘Sacred Rubbish’, 66–67.

³⁹ Valerius Maximus 1.3.4; with Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 57–59 and Versluys, ‘Isis Capitolina’, 432, dating the event to 50 BCE. M. Malaise, *Les conditions de pénétration et de diffusion des cultes égyptiens en Italie* (Leiden, 1972) 374, identifies τεμενίσματα in Cassius Dio with different cult objects (*fana*, the word used by Valerius Maximus) placed in a precinct, and argues that the consul demolished the main access.

⁴⁰ See the overview in C. Bonnet and A. Bendlin, ‘Les “religions orientales”: approches historiographiques’, *ARG* 8 (2006) 151–273, and the thought-provoking article by M. J. Versluys, ‘Orientalizing Roman Gods’, in L. Bricault and C. Bonnet (eds.), *Panthée: Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire* (Leiden, 2013) 235–59.

people in religious matters. As in the Bacchanalia affair, the authorities attempted to impose regulations in a quest to keep Roman identity intact by drawing clear boundaries for non-Roman behaviour.

Recent research, however, has abandoned the decadence model and stresses instead the will of the elite to clearly demarcate acceptable from unacceptable Roman religious behaviour using a highly malleable concept of *mos maiorum* and *Romanitas*. For example, the trope of the non-Romaness of the ‘Egyptian’ cults recurs frequently in Latin poetry and we might legitimately wonder whether the poets were simply exploiting common stereotypes or sometimes intended to harm the followers of the cult. We could thus speak of literary violence in late Republican Rome due to the continuous repetition of religious and ‘racial’ prejudices.⁴¹ The Isis cult and astrology (to which we come back in more detail in the next section) were both attractively ‘exotic’ poetic subjects and frightening ‘others’ that inspired ‘xenophobic’ reactions.⁴²

The main accusations against the Isis cult were the zoomorphic representations of the Egyptian divinities⁴³ – although Isis and Sarapis are never depicted in this way – the promiscuity and the alleged debaucheries of women involved in the cult, the immoral and non-Roman rites in the temples, the immoral and non-Roman lifestyle of the goddess herself, and the lack of an ancient connection with Roman religion. These cults, then, could be viewed not as *religio* (the lawful, accepted way of dealing with divine matters) but rather as *superstitio* (overzealous or wrongful religious veneration of the gods or irrational behaviour).⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it is clear that the main motivation behind the violence against the cult was political and connected to efforts to rein in members of the elite who used cult

⁴¹ For the Greek and Roman views of Egyptians, see B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, 2004) 362–65. One wonders whether the raucous nature of the Alexandrians is actually behind the stress over the public upheaval in 58 BCE in Cassius Dio and his sources. See also the nuanced response by E. S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton, 2011) 108–11.

⁴² For the general concept, see Frankfurter, ‘Religion in the Mirror of the Other’.

⁴³ For the Roman dislike of animal-headed divinities, see Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.36, 3.16, and *Tusculan Disputations* 5.27; Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.698; Lucan, *Civil War* 8.832; Juvenal, *Satires* 15.1–13. Virgil’s language (*monstra et latrator Anubis*) focuses his opposition to Egyptian gods on the form of the god, recalling Octavian’s dislike for Apis; see Malaise, *Conditions de pénétration*, 248. On the general Roman aversion to Egyptian animal-headed deities, see K. A. D. Smelik and E. A. Hemelrijk, ‘“Who Knows Not What Monsters Demented Egypt Worships?” Opinions on Egyptian Animal Worship in Antiquity as Part of the Ancient Conception of Egypt’, in *ANRW* II.17.4 (Berlin, 1984) 1852–2000.

⁴⁴ Cf. the idea of the so-called rationalisation of Roman religion as argued for by J. Rüpke, *Römische Religion in republikanischer Zeit: Rationalisierung und ritueller Wandel* (Darmstadt, 2014).

affiliation as a resource for political patronage and/or to further political interests in Egypt and its quarrelsome political affairs.⁴⁵

The wavering policy towards the cults of Isis and Sarapis is perhaps best illustrated by the Triumvirs Octavian, Mark Antony and Lepidus. In 43 BCE they expressed their intention to build a shrine to Isis and Sarapis in Rome, though there is no evidence that the temple was ever built.⁴⁶ Most likely, Caesar's heirs simply wished to continue the strategic alliance with Cleopatra VII, who had lived in Rome from 46 to 44.⁴⁷ Soon afterwards, Isis would again be an enemy of the Roman state, when Mark Antony's alliance with Cleopatra became a major threat to Octavian's power, triggering Roman prejudices against the Eastern Mediterranean world and Ancient Egyptian religion in particular that are visible in the literary works of this period.⁴⁸ Cleopatra's self-representation as Isis certainly fuelled this politically motivated rejection of the cult.⁴⁹ In 28 BCE the subsequent ban on all temples with an 'Egyptian' origin within the *pomerium* continued this anti-Egyptian sentiment of restoring Roman values and religion,⁵⁰ which went hand in hand with the exclusion – sometimes forceful, sometimes subtle – of foreign cults, if one follows Suetonius' account.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Orlin, *Foreign Cults*, 206, proposing that some assaults on the Isis worshippers in fact targeted political opponents. Malaise, 'Octavien et les cultes isiaques', 192–93, connects the political/social/religious struggles of the 50s BCE with the *Iseum Metellinum* under the protection of P. Cornelius Scipio Nasica, the adopted son of Metellus Pius. See Coarelli, 'Monumenti', 60–61.

⁴⁶ Cassius Dio 47.16.6.

⁴⁷ C. Alfano, 'La penetrazione della cultura egiziana in Italia', in S. Walker and P. Higgs (eds.), *Cleopatra, Regina dell'Egitto* (Milan, 2000) 210–20 at 210–12; V. Gasparini, 'Iside a Roma e nel Lazio', in E. Lo Sardo (ed.), *La Lupa e la Sfinge: Roma e l'Egitto dalla storia al mito* (Milan, 2008) 100–109 at 102.

⁴⁸ For Octavian's ambiguous relationship with the Egyptian goddesses, see E. M. Orlin, 'Octavian and Egyptian Cults: Redrawing the Boundaries of Romaness', *AJPh* 129 (2008) 231–53. On the propaganda war of the late 30s, see M. Reinhold, *From Republic to Principate: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History, Books 49–52 (36–29 BC)* (Atlanta, 1988) 222–23; L. Borgies, *Le conflit propagandiste entre Octavien et Marc Antoine: de l'usage politique de la 'vituperatio' entre 44 et 30 a.C.n.* (Brussels, 2016) 317–26; and for the non-literary evidence, P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, 1988) 57–64. On the religious component of the war, see I. Becher, 'Oktavians Kampf gegen Antonius und seine Stellung zu den ägyptischen Göttern', *Altertum* 11 (1965) 40–47 at 42–43, with Cassius Dio 50.5.3 and Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 54.

⁴⁹ For Cleopatra's representation as Isis, see M. Wyke, 'Augustan Cleopatras: Female Power and Poetic Authority', in A. Powell (ed.), *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* (London, 1992) 98–140 at 100–105. In terms of literary works, see especially Horace, *Epodes* 9 and *Odes* 1.37; Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.685–713; Propertius 3.11, 4.6.

⁵⁰ Cassius Dio 53.2.4. Cf. I. Becher, 'Augustus und seine Religionspolitik gegenüber orientalischen Kulturen', in G. Binder (ed.), *Saeculum Augustum*, vol. 2 (Darmstadt, 1988) 143–70 at 149, where she states that there was no place for Isis and Sarapis in the *pax Augustae*.

⁵¹ Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 93, with D. Wardle, *Suetonius: Life of Augustus* (Oxford, 2014) 506–509. For this traditional opinion, see P. Lambrechts, 'Auguste et la religion romaine', *Latomus* 6 (1947) 177–91; A. Wardman, *Religion and Statecraft among the Romans* (London, 1982) 63–79, 113–14;

Nevertheless, since Agrippa later extended this ban to reach half a mile beyond the *pomerium*, it was apparently still possible to construct Isis shrines beyond this boundary. Agrippa's action in 21 BCE is described by Cassius Dio in the context of rioting in the city on the occasion of the consular elections, though how the ban on Egyptian rites was supposed to calm the disturbances is not clear.⁵² The association of Isis and Sarapis with riot-prone Alexandria, underlined in 58 BCE, may be relevant here, and it is possible that these measures were staged in order to bolster Agrippa's authority as *aedilis*.⁵³

With the formal integration of Egypt into the Roman empire, the ban on Isis shrines in Rome was gradually lifted until the full integration of the Isis cult into the sacred topography of Rome under the Flavians. Acts of violence and expulsion did occur under the Julio-Claudians but were sporadic and always connected with particular incidents. For example, the expulsion of the followers of Isis under Tiberius in 19 CE as reported by Suetonius and Tacitus is linked to the abduction of a senator's wife by a so-called Egyptian priest. However, only Flavius Josephus, who is more interested in the fate of the banished Jews in the same year, informs us of Tiberius' violent reaction. The sacking of the temple, the destruction of the cult statues and the execution of the priest are believed to be a historian's and biographer's tool to illustrate Tiberius' cruel character.⁵⁴

J. W. Rich, *Cassius Dio: The Augustan Settlement (Roman History 53–55.9)* (Warminster, 1990) 134. Versluys, 'Isis Capitolina', 446, is a notable exception, suggesting that 'the Egyptian gods were thought to play their part in the imperial system as a public cult', though he does not specify the nature of that part. K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton, 1996) 288–312 and J. Scheid, 'Augustus and Roman Religion: Continuity, Conservatism, and Innovation', in K. Galinsky (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 2005) 175–93, both offer judicious comments on the theme of tradition and innovation, though Galinsky (p. 190) does suggest that Octavian and Agrippa tried to 'limit the cult of Isis'. Beard, North and Price, *Religions of Rome* 1, 167–68, discuss the importance to Octavian of representing his programme as a restoration; although they suggest (p. 228) that Octavian did concern himself with 'patrolling the unacceptable', they note the fluidity of the category 'foreign'.

⁵² Cassius Dio 54.6.

⁵³ Malaise, 'Octavien et les cultes isiaques', 197. Agrippa's actions are probably connected with the *lex Iulia de collegiis* (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 32.3). In this view, the *collegia* of the Isis temples could only escape the ban by withdrawing, thus demonstrating their respect for the superiority of Rome's civic religion; see K. Lembke, *Das Iseum Campense in Rom: Studie über den Isiskult unter Domitian* (Heidelberg, 1994) 88. In the same vein, Lembke proposes to date the foundation of the *Iseum Campense* on the Campus Martius in the period from 20 to 10 BCE, since Augustus' government style became less autocratic after the events of 19 BCE.

⁵⁴ Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius* 36; Tacitus, *Annals* 2.85; Josephus, *Judaean Antiquities* 18.65–84, and in particular for the desecralisation and destruction 18.79–80. G. Marasco, 'Tiberio e l'esilio degli Ebrei in Sardegna nel 19 d.C.', in A. Mastino (ed.), *L'Africa Romana: atti del VIII convegno di studio*, vol. 2 (Sassari, 1991) 649–59 at 649–50 (n. 4), correctly points out that the episode best fits 19 CE,

Thus, these acts can best be explained by special circumstances rather than a broader imperial policy.

Astrology

The appeal of astrology, which was both exotic and accessible, equalled that of the Isis cult in late Republican and early imperial Rome. In terms of the religious violence that it attracted, however, there was an important difference. Whereas violent action against the Isis cult targeted monuments such as altars, shrines and temples, and could thus be publicly staged for immediate political gain, divination techniques such as astrology took place mainly in private or at improvised street stands and were therefore more difficult to track and persecute.⁵⁵

Although astrology was mainly seen as a specialised technique to foretell the future and inquire into the will of the gods that did not need special places to perform a cult, the ancients nevertheless included it under religious practices.⁵⁶ We will also do so here for the sake of comparison. It was above all the risk that they might create mass hysteria with faulty prophecies that made astrologers suspicious to the established soothsayers (*haruspices* and *augures*): the rhetoric of the anti-astrological measures ultimately reflects staunch Roman pragmatism.⁵⁷ Livy calls astrologers

where it is placed by Suetonius and Tacitus, rather than 30 CE, the narrative context of the book. On this episode, see Malaise, *Conditions de pénétration*, 389–95; F. Mora, *Prosopografia Isiaca. Volume 2: Prosopografia storica e statistica del culto Isiaco* (Leiden, 1990) 91–97; Takács, *Isis and Sarapis*, 81–86; S. Ensoli, 'I santuari isiaci a Roma e i contesti non culturali: religione pubblica, devozione private e impiego ideologico del culto', in E. Arslan (ed.), *Iside: il mito, il mistero, la magia* (Milan, 1997) 306–21 at 307; A. Grimm, 'Iside imperiale. Aspetti storico-culturali del culto isiaco al tempo degli imperatori romani', in Arslan, *Iside*, 120–33 at 120–21; Malaise, 'Octavien et les cultes isiaques', 196, with reference to the recent archaeological discovery of alleged fragments of the cult statues and a couple of *sistra* that have been found in the riverbed of the Tiber.

⁵⁵ H. Wendt, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2016), speaks of freelance religious experts using ethnically coded attire and techniques to attract their clients.

⁵⁶ On astrology as a superior science of divination, see R. Gordon, 'Quaedam veritatis umbrae: Hellenistic Magic and Astrology', and D. Konstan, 'Conventional Values of the Hellenistic Greeks: The Evidence from Astrology', in P. Bilde et al. (eds.), *Conventional Values of the Hellenistic Greeks* (Aarhus, 1997) 128–58 and 159–76, respectively.

⁵⁷ F. H. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Philadelphia, 1954) 115; R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (Cambridge, MA, 1966) 131–33. This is also the main reason why the activity of astrologers was strictly regulated during Late Antiquity; see L. Desanti, *Sileat omnibus perpetuo divinandi curiositas: Indovini e sanzioni nel diritto romano* (Milan, 1990) 133–77; M.-T. Fögen, *Die Enteignung der Wahrsager: Studien zum kaiserlichen Wissensmonopol in der Spätantike* (Frankfurt, 1993); M. Hano, 'Le témoignage des textes législatifs du IV^e siècle sur les haruspices et la divination', in D. Briquel and C. Guittard (eds.), *Les écrivains du IV^e siècle: l'Étrusca disciplina dans un monde en mutation* (Paris, 2005) 4–26.

prophetic charlatans who fleece peasants;⁵⁸ Valerius Maximus, in his explanation of the expulsion of 139 BCE, repeats the prejudice that astrologers ‘spread profitable darkness with their lies over frivolous and foolish minds by fallacious interpretation of the stars’.⁵⁹ It would eventually be a result of the same accusations that the street philosophers were driven from the city.⁶⁰ We hear of fourteen expulsions of astrologers between 139 BCE and 175 CE.⁶¹ These expulsions mainly targeted street astrologers, philosophers and esoteric jacks-of-all-trades with non-elite customers. The most distinguished specialists employed by the elite, whether philosophers or astrologers, might attract political criticism but tended not to be targeted with expulsion.⁶²

In her thorough review article on the expulsions of astrologers and the reasons behind them, Pauline Ripat points out that the triggering events, the reasons for the expulsions and the groups targeted varied, and that expulsions from Rome were not the only measures taken against the astrologers.⁶³ As in the case of the Isis cult, it was seemingly easy to expel astrologers and philosophers from the city but unrealistic to expel them from the whole Italian peninsula. These expulsions did nonetheless occur from time to time, and there is a strong case for a staging for public consumption in the rhetoric used in Cassius Dio’s account of the expulsion of 33 BCE. Agrippa, as one of the *aidiles* of this year, banished astrologers and sorcerers from the city to clean up Rome and assert control over divination and prophecy.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Livy 25.1.8, 39.8, in connection with public anxieties during the Second Punic War (218–201 BCE).

⁵⁹ Valerius Maximus 1.3.3; trans. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Loeb. Note that this example is immediately followed by consul L. Aemilius Paullus’ demolition of the Isis shrine of 48 BCE in a chain of anecdotes that describe the measures of the Romans against non-Roman behaviour.

⁶⁰ The best-documented expulsion of street philosophers happened during the reign of Domitian in 93 CE; Suetonius, *Life of Domitian* 10.3; Aulus Gellius 15.11.3–5; Cassius Dio 67.13.2–3; Jerome, *Chronici canones s.a.* 95 (GCS 47, p. 192).

⁶¹ Cramer, *Astrology*, 232–48, with a summary table and discussion of the sources. See the recent reassessment by P. Ripat, ‘Expelling Misconceptions: Astrologers at Rome’, *CPh* 106 (2011) 115–54.

⁶² According to T. Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London, 1994) 50, ‘the philosophers meant were presumably the street-corner purveyors of wisdom, who could well stir up the people in times of unrest’. See W. Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 1995) 93–94, on the philosophers as an organised and therefore suspect group. Ripat, ‘Expelling Misconceptions’, 120–21, sees philosophers, astrologers, prophets and magicians as service providers who varied their offer according to city politics and were therefore not a distinctive group; Wendt, *At the Temple Gates*, 40–73, gives the most recent overview of the debate.

⁶³ Ripat, ‘Expelling Misconceptions’. The classic treatment of the legal aspects of astrology is still Cramer, *Astrology*.

⁶⁴ Cassius Dio 49.43.1, 5; with Borgies, *Conflit propagandiste*, 322.

The measures that Agrippa took, as with the first recorded expulsions, are not known to have been justified on specific religious grounds. Banning astrologers was simply a means of ridding the *res publica* of tricksters who threatened the public *salus* of the Roman people with their obnoxious prophecies and could control public opinions through rumours.⁶⁵ This line of thinking recalls the anti-conspiratorial rhetoric of the Bacchanalia affair.⁶⁶ Moreover, the measure is listed among measures intended to prevent public disorder that might arise from clogged sewage, broken streets and the wrong counting of the laps in the circus races, alongside free access to barbers on festival days and free food (salt and olive oil) for the crowd.⁶⁷ This complete programme of patronage – Agrippa paid for most of it out of his own funds – also promised to secure the loyalty of the capital's population in the conflict between Octavian and Mark Antony. In contrast to the cults of Isis and Sarapis, Agrippa and Octavian primarily saw the astrologers as a nuisance for the city.⁶⁸

With the changes in the political culture and governance of the city after Octavian's victory over Mark Antony and Cleopatra, astrology and other forms of divination became even more politically relevant. It was not, however, the everyday questions – whether an item of business was ready to be carried out, or a woman to be married – that threatened political order. It was, instead, questions concerning the death date of the emperor and the name of the new emperor, the answers to which were believed to be written in the stars but were a *crimen maiestatis* to ask from an astrologer or other expert in the divinatory arts. The emperors declared an imperial

⁶⁵ The association of astrologers with magicians points to the fact that street astrologers were the main target. For this association, see J. B. Rives, 'Magicians and Astrologers', in M. Peachin (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World* (Oxford, 2011) 679–92. That elite rivalry was also at play in the case of the expulsion of the Isis priests is argued by Cramer, *Astrology*, 233 and MacMullen, *Enemies*, 133, but cf. Ripat, 'Expelling Misconceptions', 118, who argues that too much weight is placed on this monocausal explanation.

⁶⁶ Cf. Ripat, 'Expelling Misconceptions', 128, who stresses the subcultural element of these street astrologers and prophets and the fear that they might inspire, as also mentioned by Baudy, 'Prohibitions of Religion', and Frankfurter, 'Religion in the Mirror of the Other'.

⁶⁷ Cassius Dio 49.43.1–5.

⁶⁸ Ripat, 'Expelling Misconceptions' 122–24. On the other hand, one can also argue that the political climate in Rome became tenser as the end of the second five-year term of the *triumviri* neared. In this view Agrippa was actually preparing Rome for the rally behind Octavian and could not afford to be disturbed by politically motivated 'astrologers'. See Fögen, *Enteignung der Wahrsager*, 138–41, and Ripat, 'Expelling Misconceptions', 144–46, for the political use of astrology-based rumours in the context of rival *imperatores*.

monopoly on all divination related to government and state affairs that would last until Late Antiquity.⁶⁹

Astrology thus became a state affair, although our evidence is not conclusive in every aspect since the policy of the individual emperors is far from consistent. Their attitudes towards astrology eventually became a biographical category used to describe their character, as seen in Suetonius.⁷⁰ The 'Überkaiser' Augustus countered the many inquiries into his horoscope and alleged death date by publishing his own horoscope, thus turning the alleged danger into a tool of personal propaganda.⁷¹ The haunted and reclusive Tiberius instead banned astrology altogether from his court. Suetonius in his biography sums up his legislation against foreign cult practices. Whereas the Isis priests in the above-mentioned incident of 19 CE were made to burn their garments and cult objects, the astrologers in 16 CE were simply banned from practising their art inside the city of Rome.⁷²

Tacitus provides a more detailed account of the alleged cause of the Italy-wide ban on astrologers, namely the accusations of *crimen maiestatis* against M. Scribonius Libo, who had fallen into the snares of the astrologers, magicians and dream interpreters. Facing execution, Libo took his own life, and two of the instigators, Lucius Pituanus and Publius Marcius, were executed by the sword.⁷³ Again, there is no question here of active persecution of astrologers and magicians with a series of trials. Instead, it concerned an exemplary execution of two senators with the intention of strictly controlling these practices in the politically relevant circles, and a

⁶⁹ See the classic treatment of this *longue durée* by Fögen, *Enteignung der Wahrsager*. One collateral effect of such measures was that astrology received publicity at the expense of more traditional forms of divination. The ban could thus imply that these charlatans were providing a dangerously good service that had to be restricted, as Ripat, 'Expelling Misconceptions', 131, suggests in response to A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Mutatas formas: The Augustan Transformation of Roman Knowledge', in Galinsky, *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus*, 55–84 at 65.

⁷⁰ E.g. Augustus restricted the use of *haruspices* for private inquiries and allowed them to practise exclusively in the public sphere under the control of the *res publica*, as seen in the decree of 11 CE mentioned by Cassius Dio 56.25.5 (treating astrologers and other diviners together). Thus R. Gordon, 'Imagining Greek and Roman Magic', in B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (eds.), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome* (Philadelphia, 1999) 159–275 at 261, and D. Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge, MA, 1994) 174, stress that divination as such was not forbidden.

⁷¹ See again Cassius Dio 56.25.5; Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 94.12, on which see esp. A. Schmid, *Augustus und die Macht der Sterne: antike Astrologie und die Etablierung der Monarchie in Rom* (Cologne, 2005); A.-M. Lewis, 'Augustus and His Horoscope Reconsidered', *Phoenix* 62 (2008) 308–37.

⁷² Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius* 36.

⁷³ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.27–32, with R. Syme, *Tacitus, vol. 1* (Oxford, 1958) 399–400.

signal to all the other petty astrologers and magicians to stop their practices.⁷⁴ We could call it a limited action to re-establish the *mores maiorum*, not only for the elite but also for the wider public. The resulting *senatus consultum* became the blueprint for later legislation as seen in the extract of the *Comparison of Mosaic and Roman Law*, itself an extract of Ulpian's Book 7 of *On the Duty of the Proconsul*.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, other passages in Tacitus and Suetonius reveal that the emperors were compelled to periodically reissue these bans,⁷⁶ always with limited success, and that they personally employed highly specialised consultants knowledgeable in astrology and so-called Egyptian wisdom such as Nero's *praeceptor* Chairemon.⁷⁷ The evidence implies that the banished street astrologers and other experts of divination were usually back in business before long, until the next political scandal led to the reiteration of the previous ban.

Popular at every level of society, astrology might always threaten the reigning emperor with fast-spreading rumours. The rumours of Vespasian's favourable horoscope, for instance, reportedly led to the expulsion of Vitellius and his party from Rome, although our main sources do not name Vespasian as the instigator of these rumours.⁷⁸ Cassius Dio, conversely, shows how flexibly the emperors adapted anti-astrological legislation to their means. Vespasian both consulted and expelled the best astrologers from Rome to withhold their services from those who might be dangerous to him.⁷⁹

Conclusion

The success of the Roman empire in embracing the whole Mediterranean was due to the Romans' capacity to pragmatically integrate the new elements from the periphery into the empire's centre. Rather than

⁷⁴ Ripat, 'Expelling Misconceptions', 118–20, with a discussion of the sources. She ultimately contests the link between the conspiracy of Libo (or whatever the plot was) and the mass expulsion. The passage in Suetonius is more a symptomatic description of Tiberius' paranoia against all kinds of foreign cults, including the Jews, Isis and Sarapis worshippers, and astrologers. Again, it was not the real danger but the perceived one that counted in the eye of a Roman emperor.

⁷⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.32; Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius* 36; Cassius Dio 57.15.8–9; *Comparison of Mosaic and Roman Law* 15.2.

⁷⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.52, mentions that L. Arruntius Furius Scribonianus was exiled for consulting with astrologers about the death of the Emperor Claudius shortly before reporting a *senatus consultum* banning astrologers from Italy (again).

⁷⁷ P. Rodríguez, 'Chérémon, Néron et l'Égypte hellénistique', in Y. Perrin (ed.), *Neronia VII. Rome, l'Italie et la Grèce: Hellénisme et philhellénisme au premier siècle ap. J.-C.* (Brussels, 2007) 50–73.

⁷⁸ Tacitus, *Histories* 2.78, with Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*, 175. ⁷⁹ Cassius Dio 65.9.2.

remaining narrowly tradition-bound, the elite used foreign cults as diplomatic tools, above all to bind the Hellenistic kingdoms to the empire. Nevertheless, these Eastern imports were not always uncontested or immediately assimilated. By virtue of the nature of our literary sources we know little about the reception of these Eastern cults and possible violent reactions against them among the common people. Nevertheless, we have argued that religious violence against some of them came mainly from members of the political elite acting in their own interests and not in accordance with any religious policy. Moreover, we have suggested that distinct political circumstances triggered the destruction of so-called foreign shrines in the case of the Isis cult and the political rhetoric of ridding the city of Rome from malign influences in the case of astrology. Thus it has been shown that one should always pay close attention to social and political circumstances in cases of 'religious violence'.⁸⁰

As we have seen, acts of religious violence tended to be triggered when somebody stood to gain political advantage for pragmatic reasons. It is for this reason that old stereotypes, such as the strangeness of Ancient Egyptian religion with its dog-headed god Anubis, were used in the defamation of the cult under Augustus and in Juvenal's fifteenth satire, stereotypes which were eventually passed on to the Christian critics of these cults. In the same way, astrology was subject to restrictions and violent repression because astrological techniques, associated with unreliable street astrologers, could be used to create rumours which might destabilise the political regime. Since it was impossible to persecute all astrologers, it was important to carefully stage the public actions against them for maximum deterrence and to repeat or renew them when the effect wore off. Finally, when dealing with religious violence, the critical issue is not whether or not these cult practices really were a danger to society. The causes of the violence are to be found instead in the complex combination of (individual and public) perceptions of these practices with short-term and individual political goals of members of the ruling elite, and its will to demarcate identity boundaries to reach political goals.

⁸⁰ See the General Introduction, p. 4, and Kippenberg, p. 45, both this volume.